

N.C. Plant and Animal Species Fact Sheets



Periwinkle (*Littorina irrorata*)

Introduction

Periwinkles are a common occurrence in the saltmarsh, moving up the stalks of the smooth cordgrass as the tide comes in and retreating down the stalk as the tide goes out. Although you rarely see them in the water they are a marine snail with gills.

What do they look like?

These small snails are white in color with a brown operculum. Although their bodies are brown their eyes are blue.

How big are they?

The adult snails are usually about 5/8 in. (1.8 cm)

Where do they live?

Found in the saltmarshes and tidal flats with other plants, periwinkles are usually found on the plants or on the marsh mud near their base.

Who eats them?

Fish, crabs, birds, sea urchins and small mammals all find the periwinkles good food.

What do they eat?

Periwinkles are vegetarians feeding primarily on small algae though they can eat plants like

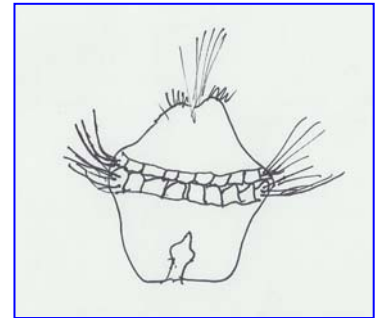
Spartina. In fact, scientists have recently found that in marshes where predators have been removed, the periwinkles feed very heavily on the Spartina, negatively impacting this important plant.

How do they mate?

Periwinkles start out as one sex then change to the other.

What are the young like?

Their eggs are in floating capsules. The young are typical mollusk larvae that become snail adults.



This trochophore larvae is the first step in development after the egg. The veliger larvae (see oyster) will be next.

People Interactions

Periwinkles can be steamed and eaten, but more importantly they occupy an important place in our ecosystem. They are sensitive to toxic agents so are often used to study chemicals in our environment. Low levels of pollution changes the snails' sex organs and their ability to reproduce.

EstuaryLive

www.EstuaryLive.org

North Carolina National Estuarine Research Reserve

www.ncnerr.org or tel. 252.728.2170

Albemarle-Pamlico National Estuary Program

<http://www.apnep.org/> or tel. 252.946.6481

Carolina Estuarine Reserve Foundation

www.cerf.us



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